

NCA
VOC FOR PGM/FN
BACKGROUNDER NO. 5-6304
EDWARD CONLEY/TOKYO

DECEMBER 7, 1978

JAPAN'S NEW CABINET

ANNCR:

THE TWENTY-MEMBER CABINET FORMED BY JAPAN'S NEW PRIME MINISTER, MASAYOSHI OHIRA, THURSDAY IS YOUNG AND MADE UP OF MINISTERS RELATIVELY UNKNOWN OUTSIDE JAPAN. V.O.A.'S EDWARD CONLEY REPORTS FROM TOKYO.

VOICE:

TWELVE MEMBERS OF THE TWENTY-MAN OHIRA GOVERNMENT ARE ASSUMING CABINET POSITIONS FOR THE FIRST TIME, MANY OF THEM FILLING HIGHLY IMPORTANT POSTS. IPPEI KANEKO, JAPAN'S FINANCE MINISTER, IS ALMOST UNKNOWN TO THE JAPANESE PUBLIC BUT IS A TOP FINANCIAL EXPERT SPECIALIZING IN TAXES. THE SIXTY-FIVE YEAR OLD MISTER KANEKO IS A FIRST-TIME CABINET MINISTER AND IT'S THOUGHT HIS EXPERTISE WILL BE CHANNELLED IN THE DIRECTION OF FINDING NEW GOVERNMENT FUNDS THROUGH NEW TAX PROGRAMS.

THE YOUNGEST MEMBER OF THE OHIRA CABINET IS FORTY-ONE YEAR OLD HEALTH AND WELFARE MINISTER RYUTARO HASHIMOTO. ANOTHER FIRST-TIMER IN A CABINET POST, MISTER HASHINOTO HAS DEVOTED HIMSELF TO WELFARE, PARTICULARLY HELP FOR PHYSICALLY AND MENTALLY HANDICAPPED CHILDREN. HIS LATE FATHER, A FORMER LIBERAL DEMOCRATIC PARTY DIET MEMBER, WAS PHYSICALLY HANDICAPPED. ANOTHER TO TAKE A CABINET POST FOR THE FIRST TIME IS DIRECTOR GENERAL OF JAPAN'S SELF-DEFENSE FORCE, GANRI YAMASHITA. THE FIFTY-SEVEN YEAR OLD MISTER YAMASHITA IS BEST KNOWN AS THE LEADING EXPERT IN ECONOMIC AFFAIRS IN THE L.D.P. SITTING ALONG WITH THE NEWCOMERS WILL BE VETERAN JAPANESE FOREIGN MINISTER SUNAO SONODA, HOLDING THE POSITION HE HAD IN THE CABINET OF OUTGOING TAKEO FUKUDA.

THE SIXTY-FOUR YEAR OLD MISTER SONODA PLAYED A LEADING ROLE IN THE CONCLUSION, EARLIER OF THIS YEAR, OF A JAPAN-CHINA PEACE TREATY. DURING HIS ONE YEAR AS FOREIGN MINISTER, HE TRAVELLED ABROAD EXTENSIVELY. IT'S THOUGHT HE HAS BEEN RETAINED IN THE FOREIGN MINISTRY TO SET THE STAGE FOR NEXT YEAR'S SUMMIT OF ADVANCED INDUSTRIALIZED NATIONS TO BE HELD IN TOKYO. AMONG OTHER TOP MINISTERS IN THE OHIRA CABINET ARE SIXTY-THREE YEAR OLD MASUMI ESAKI, THE MINISTER OF INTERNATIONAL TRADE AND INDUSTRY, AND SIXTY-TWO YEAR OLD TOKUSABURO KOSAKA, HEAD OF THE ECONOMIC PLANNING AGENCY. MISTER ESAKI HAS HELD VARIOUS CABINET AND PARTY POSTS IN THE PAST BUT IT'S THE FIRST TIME HE HAS BEEN APPOINTED TO AN ECONOMIC POST. MISTER KUSAKA IS A BUSINESSMAN-TURNED-POLITICIAN, WHO ONCE SERVED AS PRESIDENT OF THE LEADING CHEMICAL COMPANY IN JAPAN. HE HAS STRONG SUPPORT AMONG THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY.

WJL/RCS